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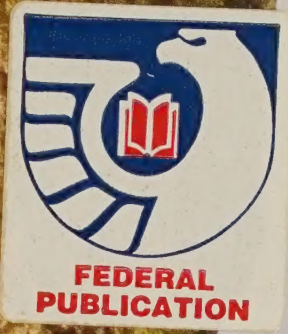




# Rock Climbing

in the **HARNEY RANGE**  
of the **BLACK HILLS**

Reserve  
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.42  
.S82H377  
2007



*In cooperation with:*





# ***A Brief History of*** **in the Harney Range of the Black Hills**

## **Pre 1940s**

**T**he first documented fifth class rock climbs in the Harney Range were climbed in 1936 by Fritz Wiessner (originally from Dresden, Germany the birthplace of modern technical rock climbing). Wiessner was instrumental in introducing modern rock climbing to America. In the Cathedral Spires Wiessner climbed the first ascents of Spire Two (5.3) and Khayyam Spire (5.7) as well as Olton's Shoulder (5.7) at Rushmore.

While climbing a first ascent, Wiessner stood on Percy Olton's shoulder as a point of aid to gain easier ground, hence the name Olton's Shoulder. When Wiessner was climbing Inner Outer (5.6), a ladder was encountered, in disgust, he tossed it down because he thought he was on the first ascent.

## **The Conn Era: 1947 to Early 1960s**

In 1947 a young couple from the East Coast, were drawn to the Harney Range by a photo of the Cathedral Spires in a geology text book. Up to that point, Herb and Jan Conn believed South Dakota to be quite flat.

The Conn's first adventure to the Harney Range was quite exciting, as they discovered the overwhelming density of climbable rock. Numerous needles, spires and pinnacles rose hundreds of feet above the forest in every direction they looked. The Conns were quite taken by the ease of approach to potential climbing routes, in addition to the level of solitude one could experience for such a convenient area. In 1949 the Conns purchased land south of the Needles, becoming the first known resident rock climbers in the Black Hills. By 1961 they had summited and named over 200 routes. The Conns left summit registers that included a penny they had engraved.

The Conns climbed in cheap, tight fitting, smooth soled, dime store, tennis shoes. Their rack consisted of WWII vintage pitons (on permanent loan from the Army), less than ten carabineers, and avalanche cord which they doubled up for use as



Herb Conn-194



# of Rock Climbing

**Black Hills of South Dakota** By Brent Kertz

slings. Lacking harnesses, the Conns tied in around their waists on their 60' length of rope, forcing them to break their routes into multiple pitches. They always down climbed due to the lack of harnesses. Out of necessity, Herb and Jan created all their routes climbing from the ground up. This ethic has been maintained in the CSP Needles.

The Conns persuaded some of their climber friends from 'back East' to visit the Black Hills while traveling to the Tetons, Yosemite and other climbing destinations. Word spread about the Harney Range and more climbers visited every year. Bill Gilson climbed with the Conns and is credited with a number of first ascents in the Rushmore area. By the early '60s the Conns discovered their passion for spelunking and took their adventures underground.



1943

## **Late 1950s to the Early 1970s**

John Gill, the father of American bouldering, started visiting the CSP Needles in the later '50s. Gill's 1961 first ascent of the Thimble, was possibly the first on sight, solo, 5.11 in the US. Gill also established a number of other committing routes throughout the CSP Needles. Gill is also credited with the 1964 first free ascent of Javelin (5.9) in the Cathedral Spires.

Bob Kamps was another visionary climber to visit the Harney Range during the '60s and pioneered numerous routes. Kamp's first ascents of Classic Crack (5.7) on Inner Outlet, Nick of Time (5.10-) on Outer Outlet, and Kamp's Crack (5.10-) on Bell Tower established some of the finest crack climbs in the CSP Needles.

In the Ten Pins, Royal Robbins visited in 1964 and climbed the first ascents of: Tricouni Nail (5.8), Queen Pin (5.9), Tent Peg (5.7) and Sandberg Peak (5.9). In 1967, Pete Cleveland established the classic Hairy Pin (5.10+R) and the unrepeated original route, Super Pin (5.11X).

Dave Rearick's first free ascent of Sore Thumb (5.9+) in 1965 is testimony to his brilliance and





zman

endurance for the era. Rearick was involved in a number of classic Harney Range first ascents. Tom Higgins also visited and made contributions to the growing list of routes. In 1964, Rich Goldstone is credited with the first free ascent of the Needle's Eye (5.8+) in addition to pioneering a number of other routes.

Don Storjohann's ascent of West Buttress (5.8+) on Outer Outlet was ahead of the time for 1964. Renn Fenton also frequented the Needles in the 1960s and 1970s producing both boulder problems and routes, most notably for the classic (5.10) direct start to the Needle's Eye. Since the early '60s, Dick Laptad continues to visit, and has been involved in a number of first ascents. Mark and Beverly Powell visited during the '60s and '70s contributing more routes to the growing list. John Evans also pioneered routes and is speculated to be responsible for several routes of mysterious origin. Bob Kamps published the first climbing guide book for the Needles in 1971.

### **The mid 1970s to early 1980s**

In the early '70s one of the Black Hills most prolific pioneers started climbing in the Harney Range. Climbing with a variety of partners, Dennis Horning (also known as Dirty Dingus McGee) first ascended a number of summits and routes in the Chessmen, Playground, Rushmore, and the CSP Needles. Dennis may hold the record for most first ascents in the Black Hills.

During this same time, Paul Piana started visiting the Harney Range and, over the course of several decades, pioneered numerous classic routes. In 1983, Piana published *Touch the Sky*, considered the most complete climbing guide book of the Harney Range (currently out of print).

In the mid '70s, Paul Muehl (also known as The Mayor of the Needles) solidified the Needles tradition for first ascents, by placing all protection on the lead from free stances. He contributed hundreds of new routes in the Needles over the course of two decades. With Peter DeLannoy, his primary climbing partner, they established over 60 new routes during the summer of 1983, in a new area they named Middle Earth. In the late '80s, before the rules changed, DeLannoy legally power drilled routes on the lead in the Needles. Paul passed away in 1996 and is remembered for his great stewardship of the CSP Needles.





Bob Archbold started frequenting the area in the mid '70s, pioneering many routes in the CSP Needles and Rushmore. Jim Schlichter also pioneered routes in the Harney Range over the course of several decades.

In 1979, Kevin Bein and Barbara Devine moved to the Black Hills. Later that year, Bein with the help of others, was able lead the first ascent of Vertigo (5.11+R) near Sylvan Lake. Prior to this point, climbers questioned the possibility of Vertigo ever being free climbed. In addition, Bein and Devine were able to pioneer a number of overlooked crack climbs in the Needles.

## **The mid 1980s to present**

During the mid '80s, Brent Kertzman took an interest in developing new routes in the Harney Range. He established new areas such as: New Domensions, The Big Gash, Raspberry Rocks, The Holy Land, West World, and added to the Iron Mountain area.

In 1985, a small group of climbers started exploring the Rushmore area to introduce sport climbing to the Harney Range. Mike Engle and Vern Phinney drilled bolts on rappel, establishing the first ascent of Mr. Critical (5.11) at Rushmore. They continued with Mark Jacobs in this style, pioneering numerous bolted routes over the next decade. In 1995, Vern Phinney published a climber's guide to Rushmore.

During the late '80s and early '90s, brothers Mike and Rusty Lewis were active in the new route scene for both the Needles and Rushmore areas, Mike Dahlberg also contributed some great new routes, and the late Todd Skinner pioneered the areas first 5.13 and 5.14 routes.

In the early '90s, Larry Shaffer moved to the

Black Hills and continues to be

a keeper of the flame for the Needles tradition of ground up first ascents. Shaffer was the first climber to seek community acceptance for the use of hooks, to aid in bolt placement, and has established a number of Needles classic routes.

Even today, 25-year climbing veterans Ron Yahne and Paul Duval, continue to pioneer new routes.









# WELCOME to the HARNEY RANGE

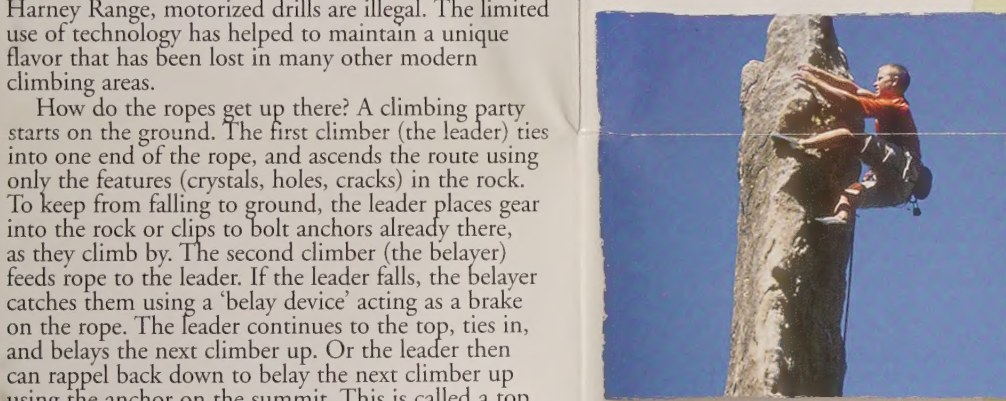
You may see rock climbers in the area enjoying the unique granite formations. Modern equipment, quality instruction, and an eye for safety make climbing a great way for friends and families to enjoy the outdoors.

Quartz and feldspar crystals make up the hand and footholds used to climb the granite spires of the area. Climbing routes are graded by difficulty on a scale that starts at 5.0 and progresses to 5.15. Guidebooks contain these ratings along with descriptions, maps and route names.

Climbers wear special shoes that are tight fitting and have special rubber on the bottom in order to better grip the rock. Helmets, carabiners, protection gear, ropes, extra clothes and food must all be carried with the climber.

Tradition stands strong in the Needles. The local ethic is for climbers to start from the ground and place removable gear, or permanent anchor bolts with a hand drill, as they climb up. It is common in some areas for people to rappel down and place anchor bolts with a power drill. In most climbing areas in the Harney Range, motorized drills are illegal. The limited use of technology has helped to maintain a unique flavor that has been lost in many other modern climbing areas.

How do the ropes get up there? A climbing party starts on the ground. The first climber (the leader) ties into one end of the rope, and ascends the route using only the features (crystals, holes, cracks) in the rock. To keep from falling to ground, the leader places gear into the rock or clips to bolt anchors already there, as they climb by. The second climber (the belayer) feeds rope to the leader. If the leader falls, the belayer catches them using a 'belay device' acting as a brake on the rope. The leader continues to the top, ties in, and belays the next climber up. Or the leader then can rappel back down to belay the next climber up using the anchor on the summit. This is called a top rope system.



# PETER NORBECK SCENIC BYWAY Gateway to Rock Climbing in the Black Hills

You are entering an area of outstanding recreation opportunities that was established through the efforts of Peter Norbeck, South Dakota conservationist, Governor and US Senator, in the 1920s. Described as "an ordinary man with an extraordinary vision", Peter Norbeck was instrumental in the establishment of nearby Badlands National Park, Mount Rushmore National Memorial and Custer State Park. His vision and efforts protected exceptional rock climbing areas in the Harney Range.

The Peter Norbeck Scenic Byway, portions of which were laid out by Senator Norbeck, provide key access to these climbing areas. This nationally designated Scenic Byway, a 66-mile scenic route, showcases some of the most spectacular rock formations in the Black Hills. As you explore these rock climbing areas, consider your actions and help preserve this climbing opportunity for future climbers.



# HARNEY RANGE Rock Climbing Area Profiles

## CUSTER STATE PARK NEEDLES AREA Middle Earth • Outlets • Photographers Peak Needles Eye • Switchback/Ten Pins Cathedral Spires/Picket Fence

The Custer State Park Needles offer the most popular and publicized summits in the Harney Range. The CSP Needles is a great playground for all climbers from the novice to the most seasoned hard cores alike. The CSP Needles offers very convenient cragging with some routes next to the highway while many others just a short 10-15 minute hike from the car.

The feldspar and quartz crystal studded rock of the CSP Needles allows for routes on virtually every aspect of most formations. The nature of the rock dictates dicey face climbs protected with bolts and pitons, which are traditionally placed on the lead, often times mixed with both clean gear and sling runner placements. A cool head is required while climbing in the CSP Needles, due to the ground up tradition which dictates less protection than one may be used to. There are also some crack routes that protect entirely with clean gear.

Many summits have aging slings for fixed anchors, or none at all. It is wise to be prepared and carry extra slings and a cordelette to build your own anchor. Due to the absence of fixed belay and rappel anchors, a Needles Style Rappel is required to descend from the summits of Super Pin, Tricouni Nail, as well as other summits.

To rig a Needles Style Rappel, a climber on the ground ties into one end of the rope to act as an anchor. The climber preparing to rappel will drape the rope through a groove on the summit, then rappel single strand style off the opposite side of the formation from the anchor person. Respect the local tradition when climbing in the Needles, do not leave rappel anchors when a Needles Style Rappel is possible.



## RUSHMORE AREA Breezy Point • South Seas • Chopping Block Monster • Emancipation Rockphormation Old Baldy

The rock in the Rushmore Area is quite diverse offering something for every climber. The great density of climbing routes within 10 minutes of the highway is amazing. Many routes tend to resemble sport protected climbs, even though most routes were established after sport climbing was introduced to the US. The adoption of sport climbing at Rushmore allowed for a large number of better protected routes than previously established in the Needles. The rock is quite varied, ranging from rough feldspar and quartz crystal faces to smooth fine grained walls with infused schist.

In addition, there are a number of cracks splitting smoother rock formations. The Emancipation Rockphormation features classic multiple pitch crack routes. The Monster, South Seas and Chopping Block Areas offer steeper crystal studded sport routes, as well as some smooth slab climbing.

Old Baldy is well worth the hike as it features some of the best rock in the Harney Range. It offers a number of multiple pitch sport and crack routes, as well as a large concentration of bouldering routes. A portion of the movie "Friction Addiction" was filmed on the boulders surrounding Old Baldy. The Breezy Point Area has a growing number of great crack and sport routes, plus a good bit of bouldering.

## IRON MOUNTAIN AND WILDERNESS AREAS

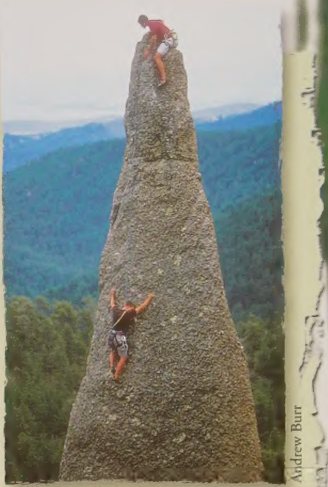
The back country areas of the Harney Range provide solitude for the adventurous climbers that seek out climbing routes with little information from a guide book. These areas are part of the Norbeck Wildlife Preserve and the Black Elk Wilderness. Please preserve the right to recreate in these areas through responsible actions.

### The Big Gash • New Domensions Raspberry Rocks

These areas are adjacent to the Iron Mountain Highway. They offer a concentration of unique rock formations, allowing everything from slab to crack, to roof routes. The Big Gash is a shady 15' wide, by 100 foot deep, corridor splitting a large dome. It features steep routes, wind sculpted holds, and crack routes. New Domensions consists of two large domes and several smaller formations offering crystal studded face routes. Raspberry Rocks has the greatest collection of crack routes, featuring the finest grained rock, in the Harney Range. The routes follow splitter cracks, cleaved dihedrals, sharp arêtes and square cut edges.

### Chessman • Elkhorn Mountain • Grizzly Creek Mt. Dallymore • The Playground

These areas offer numerous elegant crack routes plus bolt and piton protected face routes. The rock in this area is composed of smaller feldspar and quartz crystals than in CSP Needles or Rushmore. There are beautiful holds and square cut edges that are pristine and fragile, please tread lightly.



# BLACK HILLS Rules & Regulations

## Mount Rushmore National Memorial: NPS

- Bolting and fixed anchors are allowed.
- The use of power drills is prohibited.
- Annual permits are issued for power drill use for route repair through the Black Hills Climbing Coalition.
- Pets are not allowed in the backcountry.
- Camping and open fires are not allowed.
- During special events, portions of the climbing area are subject to closure.
- No entrance fee - fee to use parking structure.

## Custer State Park: CSP

- Bolting and fixed anchors are allowed.
- The use of power drills is prohibited.
- Annual permits are issued for power drill use for route repair through the Black Hills Climbing Coalition.
- Pets are allowed on leash.
- Camping and fires are only allowed in designated campgrounds.
- Entrance fee includes parking.

## Black Hills National Forest: USFS

- Dispersed camping is allowed with a 14 day limit. No open fires. No entrance fee or parking fees.

## Black Elk Wilderness

- Fixed anchors are allowed at this time.
- The use or possession of power drills is prohibited.
- Pets are allowed on leash or under strict voice control.

## Norbeck Wildlife Preserve

- Bolting and fixed anchors are allowed.
- There is a voluntary ban on the use of power drills.
- No pet restrictions except in wildlife harassment.

## General Forest

- Bolting and fixed anchors are allowed.
- There are no restrictions or permitting processes for the use of power drills, assuming the user is adhering to all other Black Hills National Forest regulations.
- No pet restrictions except in wildlife harassment.

# PUBLIC CAMPING Areas

	Agency	Camping	Camping Fee	Reservations Req.	Showers	Campfire Grates	Restrooms	Potable Water
BHNF = Black Hills National Forest								
CSP = Custer State Park								
WRINKLED ROCK Climbers Trailhead	BHNF	X					X	
WILLOW CREEK Horse Camp & Trailhead	BHNF	X	X			X	X	X
HORSE THIEF LAKE Campground & Trailhead	BHNF	X	X			X	X	X
GRIZZLY Campground	BHNF	X	X			X	X	X
IRON CREEK HORSE Camp & Trailhead	BHNF	X	X			X	X	X
CENTER LAKE Campground	CSP	X	X		X	X	X	X
SYLVAN LAKE Campground	CSP	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Campgrounds at Willow Creek, Horse Thief Lake, Grizzly, Iron Creek provide for both reservation of sites and first-come, first-served basis. Info at [www.recreation.gov](http://www.recreation.gov) or 1-877-444-6777. For camping reservations in Custer State Park call 1-800-710-2267 or on the web at [www.CampSD.com](http://www.CampSD.com). Photos provided by South Dakota Department of Tourism and Andrew Burr. Funded in part by the Federal Highway Administration. Listed agencies are equal opportunity providers. Printed on recycled paper.



# BLACK HILLS

## Climbing Etiquette

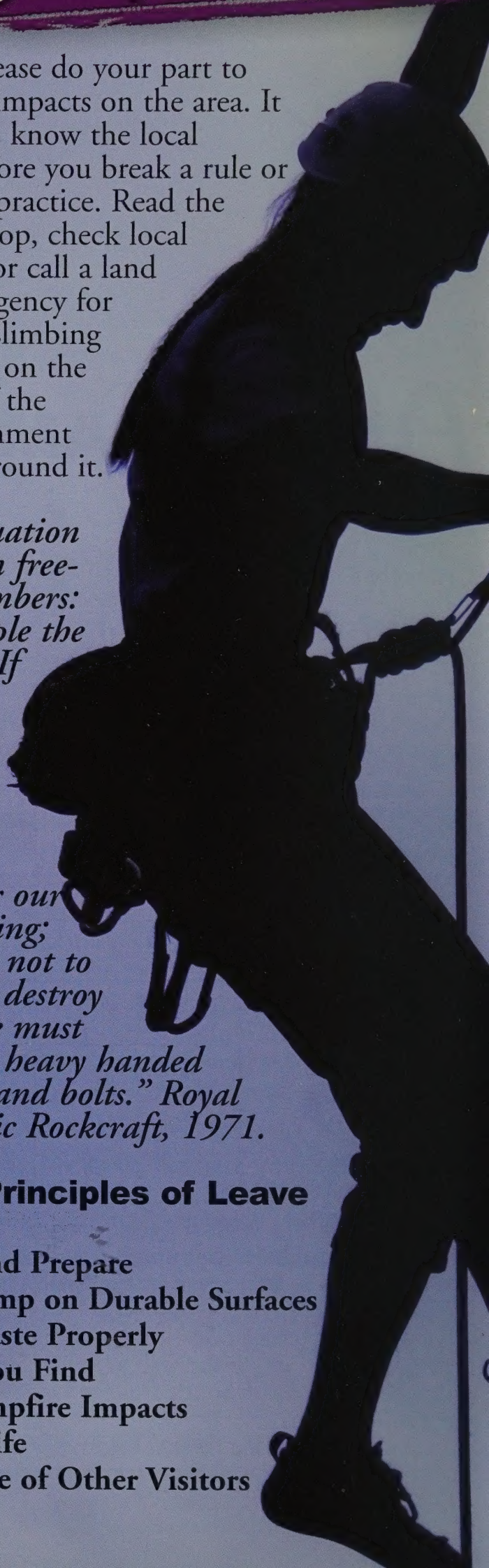


Climbers please do your part to minimize impacts on the area. It is important to know the local regulations before you break a rule or an established practice. Read the signs, visit a shop, check local guide services or call a land management agency for information. Climbing access depends on the preservation of the vertical environment and the land around it.

*"A simple equation exists between freedom and numbers: the more people the less freedom. If we are to retain the beauties of the sport, the fine edge, the challenge, we must consider our style of climbing; and if we are not to mutilate and destroy the routes, we must eliminate the heavy handed use of pitons and bolts." Royal Robbins, Basic Rockcraft, 1971.*

### **Apply the Principles of Leave No Trace:**

- Plan Ahead and Prepare
- Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces
- Dispose of Waste Properly
- Leave What You Find
- Minimize Campfire Impacts
- Respect Wildlife
- Be Considerate of Other Visitors





**Treat the rock with care!** Although there still seems to be plenty of room for new routes and new climbing areas, the rock resource is limited.

**Consider Your Impacts** - Climb new routes as they are. Avoid chopping, drilling or conforming the rock to suit your needs. Pay attention to the ecological effects of a new route and the effects leading to it.

**Use Fixed Protection With Discretion** - Respect the first ascent and do not add fixed protection to established climbs. If putting up a new route, use quality camouflaged equipment and have the knowledge to place it properly. Motorized drills are illegal in most of the climbing areas in the Black Hills. If you place a bolt in one of these areas, use a hand drill and a hammer. Excessive use of fixed protection creates a visual impact and may cause access issues. A legacy of a few good quality routes associated with your name is better than a long list of first ascents of marginal quality.

**Impacts to Others** - It is up to us to be sensitive to other outdoor users. Strive to be a good representative of the climbing community. If you like to use chalk consider its use and how it affects the experiences of others. To lessen the visibility of sport climbs, use discreet anchors. Regulations on federal lands prohibit abandoning equipment overnight, remove equipment at the end of each day.

**Habitat Impacts** - Many of the climbing areas in The Needles are characterized by cool, narrow, mossy gullies shaded by the steep granite walls. Several rare plants grow here. Avoid trampling vegetation when accessing climbing areas. Do not let your dog dig or scratch out an area to sit or lay in (consider leaving them at home). Remember, we all have an impact here, it is cumulative, and extinction is forever.

**Obey the Rules to  
Avoid Fines and Keep  
This Area Open to  
Climbing.**



# Rock Climbing

in the **HARNEY RANGE**  
of the **BLACK HILLS**

## Resources

### Websites:

[www.mountainproject.com](http://www.mountainproject.com)  
[www.bhclimbers.com](http://www.bhclimbers.com)  
[www.lnt.com](http://www.lnt.com)  
[www.blackhillsattractions.com](http://www.blackhillsattractions.com)

### Permitted Climbing Guide Services:

Sylvan Rocks Climbing School and Guide Service  
PO Box 600, Hill City, SD 57745  
605-484-7585 • [www.SylvanRocks.com](http://www.SylvanRocks.com)

Above Ouray Ice and Tower Rock Climbing Guides  
157 Hwy. 24, Devils Tower, WY 82714  
888-345-9061 • [www.towerguides.com](http://www.towerguides.com)

### Guide Books Currently In Print:

*Recommended Climbing Routes in the Needles of Custer State Park*, 2nd Ed. By John Page

*The Needles: A Climber Guide to the Black Hills Needles*  
By Zach Orenczak and Rachael Lynn  
[www.ExtremeAngles.com](http://www.ExtremeAngles.com)

*Mount Rushmore National Memorial Climbers Guide*  
By Vernon R. Phinney

### Emergency Contact:

911 – Custer County Sheriff or Pennington County Sheriff.  
605-673-8146 – Custer Search and Rescue

### Weather:

Wx information: 605-341-7531 or cell 511  
N.O.A..A. – Southern Hills 162.425 MHz  
[www.crh.noaa.gov/unr](http://www.crh.noaa.gov/unr)

### Area Information:

Black Hills National Forest  
605-673-9200  
[www.fs.fed.us/r2/blackhills](http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/blackhills)

Custer State Park  
605-255-4515  
[www.CusterStatePark.info](http://www.CusterStatePark.info)

Mount Rushmore National Memorial  
605-574-2523  
[www.nps.gov/moru](http://www.nps.gov/moru)

